



United States
Environmental
Protection Agency

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EPA and HHS Urge Caution in Areas Exposed to Contaminated Flood Water

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(Washington, D.C.-September 6, 2005) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are cautioning the public and all responders about the potential hazards associated with flood waters.

Every effort should be made to limit contact with flood water due to potentially elevated levels of contamination associated with raw sewage and other hazardous substances.

EPA and HHS are providing the following guidelines for those in contact with flood water:

- Wash your hands before drinking and eating
- Wash frequently using soap -- especially disinfecting soap
- Do not smoke
- Limit direct contact with contaminated flood water
- Report cuts or open wounds and limit exposure
- Report all symptoms
- Keep vaccinations current

EPA and HHS recognize that Hurricane Katrina has caused extraordinary circumstances and that people may not currently have access to clean water, vaccinations, doctors, or disinfecting soap. EPA and HHS encourage people in these extraordinary circumstances to adhere to the above guidelines as closely as is possible to limit exposure to possible water contaminants.

The public and emergency response personnel should follow guidelines from federal, state and local health and safety professionals. Early symptoms from exposure to contaminated flood water may include upset stomach, intestinal problems, headache and other flu-like discomfort. Anyone experiencing these and any other problems should immediately seek medical attention.

General precautions to reduce contact with contaminated flood include routine washing with soap, and not eating or drinking while in contact with flood water. These precautions can significantly help reduce potential exposure and illness. Anyone with open-wounds or pre-existing conditions should seek immediate consultation to prevent possible illness.

EPA and HHS will continue to provide more information to the public and responders as it becomes available. Again, the general public and responders should limit exposure to flood water and seek medical attention if they develop symptoms.

For more information go to: <http://www.epa.gov/katrina>

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